DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 136 177 CG 011 437

AUTHOR Harrington, Pamela C.
TITLE Presentation Summary of Decision Making for Life Cycles.
PUB DATE 8 Mar 77
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (Dallas, Texas, March 6-9, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment (to Environment); *Conflict Resolution; Convergent Thinking; Creative Thinking; *Decision Making; Divergent Thinking; Guides; *Individual Psychology; Logical Thinking; *Problem Solving

ABSTRACT

This guide discusses the need for decision making expertise, and the steps to attain it. First, human beings are forever encountering the necessity to make choices, because they are constantly striving to adapt to their environment and to co-exist with others, Second there is an expectation that individuals will be independent. Third, psychological research has brought to the foreground literature introducing an adult development pattern. The following steps should be taken in decision making: (1) identification of the problem; (2) identification of alternatives; (3) gathering of information; (4) evaluation and (5) selection. (Author/JLL)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

#282

ED136177

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

of

DECISION MAKING FOR LIFE CYCLES

AMERICAN PERSONNEL AND GUIDANCE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION

DALLAS, TEXAS

MARCH 8, 1977

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

by

PAMELA C. HARRINGTON

BISHIP CLARKSON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL SCHOOL OF NURSING

OMAHA, NEBRASKA

CG011437

The unrest with this exercise (Harrington & Lind 1976) is reflective of decision making being more than a flippant task. It is work: training, concentration, and mental exertion.

The rigors of choosing are interwoven into the steps of decision making which are simple to spell out (the steps): 1) identification of the problem, 2) identification of alternatives, 3) gathering of information, 4) evaluation, and 5) selection. The incorporated complexity is twofold. These steps interact with one's mental aptitude, emotions, physical health, environment, and culture. Secondly, the decision making pattern implies auxiliary skills. The ability to define a problem, think creatively, concentrate, collect accurate information, accept responsibility, and follow through on decisions are implied proficiencies.

Complexity, however, does not render decision making as an impossible learning task. The techniques can be divided into digestible pieces, relevant principles taught, demonstrations on how the abstract is translated into the concrete, and opportunities to apply. Experimentation is crucial.

Before advancing into a 'how to' model, a discussion of one rationale for urging decision making expertise may be persuasive.

Human beings are forever encountering the necessity to choose because they are constantly striving to adapt to their environment and co-exist with others, i.e., taking a hot, steamy, long shower is re-evaluated when water becomes scarce.

Secondly, there is the expectation that individuals will be independent. As mental health practitioners we advocate the capacity to stand autonomous, "an awareness and utilization of inner strengths and the resources of nature." (Stevens 1971) Interdependent relationships are said to be most rewarding upon a foundation of independency: I can stand alone but I choose to be with you. (Jongeward & James 1971)

Thirdly, psychological research has brought to the foreground literature introducing an adult development pattern. To date writings suggest the existence of stages of growth commencing with the age eighteen. (Lowenthal 1975) The most exciting and challenging premise of adult developmental theorists is that the life span of a human being is evolutionary; as the species has evolved so has individual lives. (Sheehy 1976) That is, throughout one's life there is reappraisal, modification, clarification, and rebirth. The status quo is not stationary. Between the age eighteen and the early twenties individuals are working on a final draft entitled, "I am ..."; a personal philosophy is being refined and a mission is set. (A mission is a statement of our ambitions.) The late twenties - early thirties mark the first 'second look'. Men and women survey their original scenarios and, most often, conclude there must be more. The knowledge of how to make choices and a willingness to change influences the outcome of the early thirties. At forty shifting gears occurs again. Initial reaction to the midpoint of life is depression. The degree

is contingent upon, "how well did I accomplish my ambitions? Did I raise my children right?" and a personal concept of aging. The people who successfully pass through this 'down turn' are individuals who have collected their thoughts and feelings and use their own rich data for deciding how they will, here and now, regard money, religion, death; and answer, "what am I going to do for the next twenty-five, thirty-five . . . years of my life?" (Lowenthal 1975) The new resume a person writes frequently reflects Eleanor Roosevelt's enlightenment: "Somewhere along the line of development we discover what we really are and then we make our real decision for which we are responsible. Make that decision primarily for yourself because you can never really live anyone else's life, not even your own child's."

If we are going to follow our natural growth pattern, be autonomous, and talented at adaptation we need decision making skills. This expertise is not locked within a time capsule; it transcends the moment. And, most important, men and women obtain a structure, a foundation for integrating emotions and intellect with the external world.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

The significance of being able to verbalize a problem statement(s) lies in the self-reassurance that comes with being able to move from "I want more out of life" to crystallization of what constitutes more. Realistically, when an individual is in a quandry, the dilemma is multiple. The person who says, "I want more," may reflect the conclusion of a series--career woos, enticed by the success of others, questioning the political system, dissatisfaction with choices made at twenty.

To begin identifying the components there is a need to start with an open-ended question. (Ivey 1971) Open ended questions offer structure without determining a response. It is important to note that the 'best fit' is "What causes my desire for more?" as opposed to "What do I want?" There is the necessity of gaining an understanding of the stimuli so appropriate responses can be chosen. Further, before a person can advance into alternatives and collecting of information, there needs to be a realistic perception of the situation.

A valuable auxiliary is keeping records. It is advantageous to write or tape thoughts as they come to the foreground. Lists provide an avenue for taking an external look and corroborating that the problems are genuine. Secondary? Primary? Furthermore, it provides an opportunity to define who owns the problem. "My husband/wife is unhappy" is not my problem. More accurate may be

"my insistance to guarantee my husband/wife's happiness." Noting personal unrest is admitting the problem remains with you and not with the other individual. This is the heart of the concept of problem ownership.

IDENTIFICATION OF ALTERNATIVES

The real agenda is creative thought. The goal is to bring into being numerous options. The outcome being enhancement of the probability of uncovering a viable choice. People, historically, have trouble with creative thought because inventiveness calls for courage (May 1975): to be attuned to intrapersonal messages, to concentrate, and a willingness to reshape one's personal status quo. Violation of the conventional can be anxiety producing. The tension is increased by the inevitable - and healthy - stumbling, fumbling and errors. We may need to be wrong in order to achieve a workable choice. (de Bono 1973)

Because originality is difficult for many, the introduction of structure to facilitate release of new thoughts is recommended. The following nonverbal gymnastics are designed to be a prelude. The verbal activities are drawn to foster invention of new thoughts.

At the nonverbal level there is an effort to expand the boundaries of the mind. This is frequently done in psychotherapy, i.e., Gestalt activities seek to foster "how a person can explore, expand and deepen his awareness." (Stevens 1971) In summary, whenever the goal is to expand there needs to be a stimulus.

Nonverbal Gymnastics

Guided Fantasies

- Ocean Trip
- Write own lyrics
- Write own poetry
- Musical titles

The objective is twofold: expansion and collection of information about self; a personal esthetic discovery.

- Gestalt Exercises
- Word Focus

To promote concentration

Physical Exercise

Diary

Observe Environment
(We say leaves are falling. Yet leaves do not fall any appreciable extent while we are looking. Leaves fall during storms or at night/ early morning when most of the stiff wind blows.)

Verbal Gymnastics

Write Everything Down

Use a Quota System

Challenge ALL Assumptions

List Dominate factors (Element(s) which must always be included.)

Reversal of problem statement

Analogies (Borrow from TA the fairy tale. Create a tale that is parallel to the situation. At the end translate back and see what may have happened to the original.)

Write an initial list of ideas then:

- Adapt
- Modify
- Subtract
- Rearrange
- Synthesize
- Multiply
- Substitute

New ideas are improvements of previous thoughts.

Human beings finest insights follow a period of diligent work. One theory is insight occurs during the transition between work and rest. (Adams 1976) During rest the unconscious may breakthrough and contribute. Adaptation of this theory is allowing for an interlude between generating alternatives and collection of data.

COLLECTING INFORMATION

A complete composite is necessary before a choice is made. The rendering is based on alternatives and information collected. The highest incident of error in decision making is at this point of assembly. The most frequently cited errors are failure to forecast possible outcomes, misinterpretation of data, minimizing importance of data, and collecting useless data. By employing a checklist the individual can reduce the potential for "I didn't know."

1) Check accuracy of assumptions and facts. Check credibility of sources. Valid? Invalid?

2) Estimate the probability of each option. What are your qualifications for graduate school? Shifting careers? Are you willing to meet the demands? Crucial clarification: we do not have power over outcomes. Our influence rests with the present. What is known about the here and now serves as a guide for concluding probable sequels. (Gelatte et al, 1973)

3) List catastrophies feared. This speaks to the fear of failure. By acknowledging worries individuals move closer to being in command of those apprehensions.

4) Consider personal strengths and weaknesses and how each alternative draws upon them.

EVALUATION AND SELECTION

Planned review permits an individual to integrate intellect and emotional with accountability and commitment. That is, our ethical and judicial codes and psychological orientations are founded on people assuming responsibility for his/her own behavior. Secondly, a choice has value when there is follow through. Without behavioral commitment energies invested are wasted.

Pro/Con Lists provide a balancing system for pulling together creative thought and data gathered in light of personal aspirations and the above realities. It is crucial to note that the individual who lacks formalized aspirations will have difficulty. Decisions need to relate to personal blueprints. Without a correlation decisions exist within a vacuum.

A valuable supplementary technique is to converse with a trusted friend, counselor or significant other. The vantage point is to verify congruency of thought and that all significant factors have been considered.

Finally, MAKE A DECISION. To continue debate defeats the goal of decision making. People need to choose and implement.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, J., Conceptual Blockbusting, San Francisco: San Francisco, Co., 1976.

Bensen, H., The Relaxation Response, New York: Avon Publisher, 1975.

Boleslavsky, R., Acting the First Six Lessons, New York: Theatre Art Books, 1949.

Bono, de E., Lateral Thinking: Creativity Step by Step, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970.

Cassel, R., The Psychology of Decision Making, North Quincy, Massachusetts: Christopher Publishing House, 1973.

Gelatte, Varnhorst, Carey, Miller, Decisions and Outcomes, New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1973.

Gordon, T., Parent Effectiveness Training, New York: Peter H. Wyden, Inc., 1970.

Greenblat, Stein & Washburne, The Marriage Game, New York: Random House, 1974.

Harrington & Lind, Risk Game, Unpublished Manuscript, Omaha, Nebraska: Bishop Clarkson Memorial Hospital School of Nursing, 1976.

Ivey, A., Microcounseling, Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1971.

James & Jongeward, Born to Win, Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1971.

Jongeward & James, Winning With People, Reading Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1971.

Lowenthal & Associates, Four Stages of Life, San Francisco: Jasey-Bass, Inc., 1975.

May, R., The Courage to Create, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975.

Osborn, A., Applied Imagination, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963.

Parnes, S., Creative Behavior Guidebook, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967.

Parnes & Harding, A Source Book for Creative Thinking, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962.

Schutz, W., Elements of Encounter, Big Sur, California: Joy Press, 1973.

Sheehy, G., Passages, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1976

Stevens, J., Awareness: Exploring, Experimenting, and Experiencing, Moab, Utah: Real People Press, 1971.